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1900-12-30

**Letter from Charles H. Shinn to Robert Underwood Johnson, 1900
Dec 30.**

Charles H. Shinn

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Recommended Citation

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John Muir Correspondence (PDFs). 4356.
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Cal.
Niles, December 30, 1900

Mr. Robert Underwood Johnson,

My Dear Sir:-

Your recent letter asking about the condition of the supposed Armstrong forest and our duties as trustees was duly received, but I could not at once reply, because, although I presumed as you did that the death of Colonel Armstrong ended the whole matter, I still thought it necessary to ascertain the facts.

I was in Santa Rosa a few days ago (the county seat of Sonoma), and there examined the history of the redwood land in question. I found that in 1892 a deed was recorded transferring this valuable land to the five trustees. This, with several other transfers, made it seem as if something tangible, not before known to me, had occurred, creating or tending to create a trust which bound us, and to which we were bound.

I then went to Cloverdale, saw the Armstrong family and, returning to Santa Rosa, verified the truth of their statements by having the records searched.

Briefly, the story is this: Colonel Armstrong secured several transfers from his wife and others, which were really in the nature of quit-claim deeds, preliminary to a final deed from himself. His own signature ^{and Kate Armstrong's} only missed going on one of these deeds by a slight illness of his ^(which would have made the trust secure). As it stands, a successful contest on the part of the widow (who was his second wife) ⁺ who had limited her own interest

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in the estate by a special agreement, would leave the trusteeship in actual existence, holding a half-interest in the tract; the other half would belong to the Kate Armstrong estate. In other words the widow deeded her interest to us, but if other papers filed previously are not contested, she had nothing to deed! There is no probability of any such contest, which would be unfortunate from every point of view, although she would gain largely in other directions.

The total value of the Armstrong estate is about \$100,000. The assessed value of the redwood land is \$20,000 and it is probably worth \$50,000 as it stands. If Colonel Armstrong had retained his capacity for business, he would probably have proved able to deed this, and endow it, as he planned, with a large sum of money. His desire to do this led him to put off the final deed from ~~YE~~ time to time until he broke down.. His family lawyer tells me that he expected to give *it* \$100,000 in cash, and that he would very likely have done so if his health had been maintained, as he was an able man, handling large enterprises, which were, however, beyond the capacity of those who had to take them up.

I was impressed with the evident anxiety of Miss Lizzie Armstrong, the present head of the family, to secure in the end some memorial of her father to whom she was much devoted. She hopes that the original grove of forty acres, all very fine trees, -- virgin forest -- can ultimately be deeded for a forestry station, under the charge of the University, or handled in some way that will make it useful to the State. She is to communicate with me from time to time

and will ask me to draw up a working plan when the estate can afford the gift. She desires me to express to you her heart-felt sorrow that nothing has come of this effort of a very earnest and progressive man to establish a large forest-station in California, and she ~~MAX~~ sincerely hopes that you will be able to cooperate with us at some future time.

I do not know whether you received in 1891, or since, a copy of a small, privately-printed pamphlet, being the "deed of gift to the trustees." ^(New recorded) This explained, in twelve pages Colonel Armstrong's scheme for the botanic garden and park, and was immediately followed by the deed from his wife to which I have alluded, and by other preliminary operations. If another copy of this can be obtained, I will send it to you so that if you deem it of historic interest you can put it among your family documents.

This would seem practically to conclude the trusteeship -

Very sincerely yours,

Charles H. Shinn